

Gardeners Information Service



RELEASING NEMATODES

What time of year is best for broadcasting beneficial nematodes on lawns? I have read that the ground must be wet but have not found information about soil or air temperatures.

—P.C., ARLINGTON, TEXAS

Beneficial parasitic nematodes—microscopic roundworms in the phylum Nematoda—are effective controls for several insect pests of turf and garden plants, including the larvae (grubs) of Japanese beetles. Beneficial nematode products are sold in a dry form to mix with water under several names such as BioSafe, BioVector, and Guardian. Different formulations are designed to target specific pests, so be sure you purchase the appropriate brand for the pest you wish to control.

As you noted, adequate moisture is the most important environmental factor when applying insect-parasitic nematodes; they require free water to move and are susceptible to death by drying. Be sure to water the area

thoroughly before and after releasing nematodes. Soil and air temperature is less critical, but avoid applications when temperatures are unseasonably high or low.

Robin Giblin-Davis, a nematologist at the University of Florida in Fort Lauderdale, says that timing of application depends on the specific pest you are trying to control. Once you identify the pest, learn when its most vulnerable stage occurs. “The nematodes must be available in the highest quantities and in the right place to do the job,” says Giblin-Davis. Since nematodes persist for only about two weeks once they are released, it is critical to apply them when the pest is present and vulnerable. Information about timing of application is usually listed on the nematode product label, or consult your local Cooperative Extension service or botanical garden for advice.

An excellent resource for more information is Ohio State University’s Web page “Insect Parasitic Nematodes” at www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/nematodes/default.htm.

PERENNIAL CONFUSION

When I started the process of registering flowers at a flower show, I was informed that if a perennial is grown in a zone in which it is not considered hardy, it is then classified as an annual. Can you explain?

—L.R., MOUNTAIN HOME, ARIZONA

True annuals are plants that complete their life cycle and die within a single growing season, while perennials persist from year to year. Herbaceous perennials commonly die back to the ground at the end of the growing season, but their root systems survive, and the plant resumes growth in spring after a dormant period.

In regions where herbaceous perennials are not hardy—that is, where they cannot survive outdoors through winter—they are sometimes grown for a single season in the same manner as annuals. Since these are not true annuals, they are more accurately labeled tender perennials. But where they are not hardy,

AHS Gardening Community Listserve

The following items were part of an AHS Gardening Community Listserve conversation a few weeks ago. All members are invited to join our

Listserves and participate in discussions, pose questions, share gardening experiences, or just tune in and enjoy the banter. To join our Listserve, simply click on the Listserve button on the AHS Web site: www.ahs.org.

I am planning to plant some lilacs this spring. I haven't made my selections yet, but wanted to get your opinion about which varieties you all like best. What are your favorite lilacs?

—M.S., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Lilacs are heat sensitive. While they will grow in my area (USDA Zone 6), they only do well when we have cooler summers. Otherwise,

they struggle and tend to get disease. Maybe someone knows a variety that doesn't mind days of heat in the 90s.

—B.H., Friendsville, Tennessee

Lilacs do much better in more northern climates. I am at the very end of their southern tolerance. ‘Miss Kim’ is the only one I have, and it seems to take the heat here in stride. I've had it for about 10 years, and so far it is still healthy and blooms in much more shade than lilacs generally like.

—M.T., Potomac, Maryland

Well, maybe not the “very end.” We grow ‘Miss Kim’ here, and it's doing well. I have also grown Blue Skies™, which also does well.

—W.and D.J., Lake Oconee, Georgia

The description in the Wayside Gardens catalog says Blue Skies™ is an exceptional per-

former for southern gardens—very disease resistant, tolerates heat and humidity, and is highly resistant to mildew. Also says it does not require winter chill to set buds.

—A.H., Beaufort, South Carolina

Here's more on Blue Skies™: It was introduced by Ralph Moore in 1987. Its correct botanical name is *Syringa vulgaris* ‘Monore’, but it's usually sold under the trademark name Blue Skies™. It's confusing when the commercial industry uses another name for a plant than that chosen by the developer. But then, wouldn't you rather buy a Blue Skies™ than a ‘Monore’?

—K.M., Fort Wayne, Indiana

A pretty good substitute for lilacs in hot areas like Texas is chaste tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*)—it has similar coloring and effects.

—P.E., Kemp, Texas

the culture of tender perennials is so similar to that of true annuals that some flower shows may elect to group them together.

LEAFLESS MAGNOLIA

Three years ago we planted a five-foot sweet-bay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) in October in a sunny spot and watered it regularly through its first summer. The first two winters were unusually mild, and the tree grew and bloomed well. This past winter was much cooler, and this spring we had several late hard frosts when the tree was in bud. Those buds never opened, and the new stem growth has a bluish-gray color. What has caused the leafless condition, and is there anything we can do about it?

—L.J., SALEM, OREGON

Magnolias, in general, resent being moved, and the best time to transplant them is in spring, when new growth is starting. Native to the southeastern United States, sweetbay magnolia grows best in boglike settings with light shade. It is usually evergreen in the southernmost part of its habitat but is deciduous in cooler climates like yours.

Even though you didn't transplant the tree at the optimum time, it appears the combination of your careful treatment and the mild winters meant your tree suffered no ill effects. Unfortunately, the late frosts this year undid some of that by shocking the tree and apparently killing the new leaf buds. The tree may still develop leaves—and even flowers—this year, but later than usual. The bluish-gray coloring of the stems is probably the natural maturation of the bark. Mulch the root zone with well-rotted cow manure or compost and make sure the tree receives regular deep waterings this summer if you have dry spells. It may take a couple of years for the tree to regain its vigor, but it should survive and perform reasonably well once it's thoroughly established.

William May, Gardeners Information Service, and Marianne Polito, Gardeners Information Service Manager.

WE'RE READY TO HELP:

For answers to your gardening questions, call Gardeners Information Service at (800) 777-7931, ext. 131, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Eastern time, or e-mail us anytime at gis@ahs.org.



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So if, like Laura, your idea of a beautiful garden view doesn't include weeds, look for **Preen** products at your local gardening retailer. And discover the joys of weed-free gardening.



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